REMBRANDT

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Berlin, Royal Gallery

PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF

REMBRANDT

BY

RICHARD MUTHER

TRANSLATED BY

FRANCIS F. COX

SIEGLE HILL & CO.

2 LANGHAM PLACE, LONDON, W.

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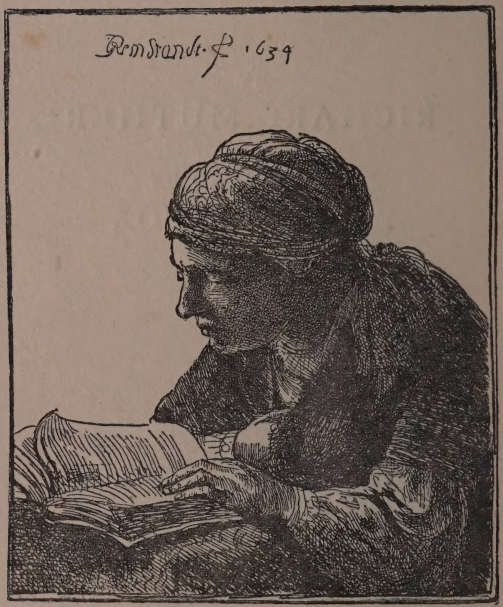

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INTRODUCTION

IN Antwerp there may yet be seen the house of Rubens, the home wherein that mighty artist lived a life of princely splendour, and where he finally closed his eyes amidst universal mourning. The house that Rembrandt occupied during his days of prosperity in the Breestraat of Amsterdam passed in 1656 into the possession of a master shoemaker, and he ended his life in a den on the Rozengracht, unheeded as any beggar.

How are we to explain this diversity in the fortunes of the two masters who hold the highest rank among the painters of the Netherlands? Undoubtedly the human factor must be reckoned with. Rubens was an accomplished man of the world. Distinguished and decorative in appearance, a scrupulous respecter of conventions, he laid all men beneath his magic spell. A marvellous harmony existed between his own artistic aims and the requirements of his patrons. Rembrandt, on the other hand, was a churl. He annoyed his Dutch

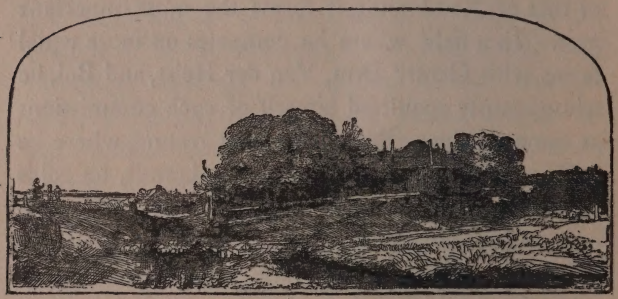
fellow countrymen as much by his brusque and cavalier manners as by his disregard of the bourgeois standard of morality. Commissions entrusted to him with great condescension he treated in such wise that the result was invariably a work of art, an imperishable work of art, but it was seldom exactly in accordance with the wishes of the worthy citizen who had ordered it.

And this result leads up to our second point. Flanders, in the days of Rubens, was the home of a culture both ecclesiastical and aristocratic in character. Art was called upon to minister on one hand to the constant needs of a religion that delighted in the beautiful, and on the other to the requirements of connoisseurs schooled in the principles of aestheticism. In democratic and Protestant Holland the patron of art was the ordinary citizen, and thus the public became the sole dictator of artistic taste. Art derived many advantages from this popular demand. Formerly the luxury of the few, it now pervaded the life of the populace. It is recorded that in those days, even in the rooms of tailors and shoemakers, oil-paintings occupied the place of the modern photograph. Yet, on the other hand, is it not probable that the honest craftsmen would have preferred the

photograph, had the means of producing it been then in existence? Does not the term "Art for all" imply a tragic contradiction? Can the taste of the common herd ever find expression in the work of an artist—a genuine artist?

The greatness of Rembrandt and the secret of his ultimate destiny are both implied in the answer to the following question: In what particular did he differ from all who had wielded the brush before him? His predecessors worked on commissions. Such work as was executed by Dürer and Holbein, Raphael and Titian, Velazquez and Rubens, unordered and without a definite practical purpose, plays but a very secondary rôle in their total output: of that of Rembrandt it forms the most important part. In a field where he competes on more equal terms with Gerard Dou, Van der Helst, and Bol, he triumphantly acquitted himself of such commissions as came to him. But on his own ground, where he is Rembrandt himself, the real Rembrandt, he holds converse with himself alone, he gives utterance only to his own artistic ideas, and paints, and paints, and paints, without once asking himself the why or wherefore. And thus he became the first artist to free himself from the thrall of the patron, the first proud apostle of "Art for Art's sake." Spurning

every beaten track, borne up by his genius alone, he soared to realms of beauty that no eye had ever yet beheld; and this is the true reason that his fellow citizens held aloof from him, and that he produced work that found no market, instead of consistently catering for the requirements of the common herd. We are here brought face to face with the fact that in all culture which takes its tone from the taste of the middle classes, the more an artist serves Art the more he will stand alone. This is the moral which the fate of Rembrandt may well impress on the minds even of our own generation.



YOUTHFUL DAYS AT LEYDEN

REMBRANDT van Rijn was born, the son of a miller, at Leyden on July 15, 1606. Works of art can have had but little influence in moulding his youthful imagination; but the man who is marked out by destiny to be an artist has Nature herself for his teacher. Strange thoughts may have flitted through the boy's brain, as he rested in the shade of his father's windmill upon the hill, and gazed down upon the low-lying land of Holland—upon those broad, immeasurable plains, whose dead level throws into such high relief the mighty vault of the heavens above.

For a time he cherished the ambition of becoming a scholar. For a couple of terms he attended the University of Leyden. Then the artist in him awoke. At first he worked in the studio of the landscape-painter Isaak Swanenburgh at Leyden, and later on in that of Pieter Lastman. It is true that he can no more be considered a pupil of either of these artists than Dürer is to be reckoned a pupil

of Wohlgemuth, but their aid sufficed to initiate him into the tricks of his calling, and no sooner had he mastered its rudiments than he cast off their leading-strings and proceeded to grope his own way. A room in his father's house served him as a studio, and there he arranged for himself subjects in still life, or else his parents, or his sister, often arrayed in some gaudy travesty, were pressed into his service as models.

It may be stated quite dispassionately, and without prejudice to the great Rembrandt of later times, that these youthful efforts are painfully devoid of interest. They show our artist in the light of a superior Gerard Dou. At one time he occupies himself with meticulous trivialities which are both uninteresting and pedantic, and at another he grapples laboriously with the light-problems which his age had propounded to its painters. Rembrandt is celebrated in all manuals of art history as a great luminist. Raphael and he are considered to represent the opposite poles of the Latin and the Germanic conceptions of art. In Raphael's work, it is claimed, the dominant idea is plastic beauty of form ; while in that of Rembrandt the purely picturesque beauty of colour as influenced by light and shade reigns supreme. And it is on arbitrary distinctions such

as these, dictated solely by considerations of nationality, that such comparisons between the styles of various epochs are based.

The sixteenth century, in the North and South alike, found its artistic expression in line and in plasticity of modelling. The seventeenth century, alike in the South and in the North, rejected hard outlines in favour of forms modelled by the treatment of light, and adjusted the balance of composition by masses of light and shade instead of by an architectural system of building up. An Italian, the great Caravaggio, was the first to formulate this principle. His artistic contemporaries, posthumous children of the Renaissance, derisively labelled his style of painting as "the art of the cellar trap-door," because his figures convey the impression of having been painted in a dark room into which a brilliant beam of light falls from above. Pieter Lastman, Rembrandt's teacher, had been, while in Italy, a pupil of Caravaggio. Another Dutchman, Gerard Honthorst of Utrecht, who also had sojourned long in the South, was named by the Italians Gherardo della Notte, the painter of night-pieces, because he varied the "cellar-trap" style of Caravaggio by lighting his subjects with ordinary candles, for the purpose of producing sharp contrasts of light and

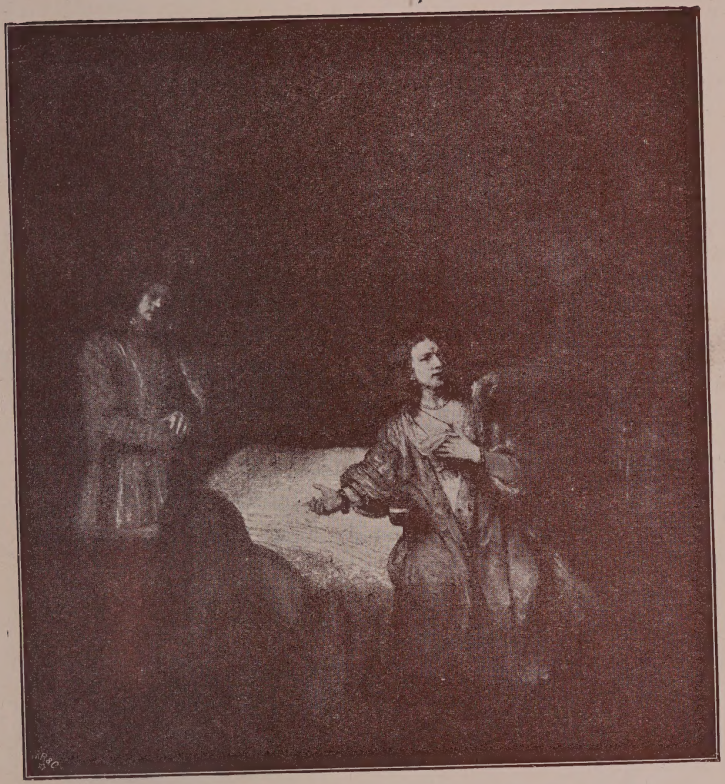
shade. Thus the youthful Rembrandt's treatment of light-problems was neither original nor was it characteristic of the Northern schools of painting. He swam with the stream of European art. When he paints Paul in prison as an aged man in a dark chamber illuminated from above by a sharply defined shaft of bright light, his picture resembles a Caravaggio reduced to trivial prettiness. When he depicts (as in a work in the Berlin Museum) an old banker testing the genuineness of a gold coin by candle-light, he is doing practically nothing else but garnish a money-changer in the style of Quentin Matsys with the lighting of Gerard Honthorst.

His early etchings indicate the nature of the sights he saw upon the high roads. It was in the days of the Thirty Years' War, and disbanded mercenaries, cripples, and beggars swarmed throughout Holland. Rembrandt, like Callot, exercised his art upon picturesque figures such as these. His etchings bear the stamp of an artist whose sketch-book was always ready to his hand, and whose dexterous pencil was quick to catch and perpetuate the image of aught that pleased his fancy. His own features furnished him with a no less fertile field of study. One of the works of Hokusai is entitled "A

Hundred Views of the Mountain Fuji." He drew the mountain Fuji towering in sharply defined outline against the cloudless sky ; he drew it swept by storms, and shrouded in snowflakes ; now bleak with the barrenness of winter, and again radiant with the floral wealth of spring. Rembrandt likewise knew that a single object may comprise within itself a whole universe for those who look upon it with the eye of an artist, and his own features furnished him with an inexhaustible mine of fresh problems. His earlier attempts at self-portraiture were simply studies in physiognomy. The sixteenth century, the age of "gravità riposata," thought with Beaudelaire : "Je haïs le mouvement qui déplace les lignes, et jamais je ne ris, jamais je ne pleure." The *barocco* period, in direct contrast to this, was an emotional era, and turbulent passions took the place of the former aristocratic repose. Rembrandt too studied the changes wrought in facial expression under the mastery of certain emotions. He posed before a mirror, and drew himself in the act of grinning, rolling his eyes, or starting back in horror. As yet he did not get beyond grimaces, beyond the impression of what was unnatural and forced ; nevertheless it is always interesting to note how early he commenced the

studies that were later on to endow him with such magic power over the souls of men.

Two pictures of the year 1631, one now at Munich and the other at the Hague, mark the close of this period of activity at Leyden. The Munich picture shows the interior of an artisan's dwelling. Two figures in contemporary attire—a realistic conception of Mary and Joseph such as the seventeenth century set up in opposition to the monumental style of the Cinquecento, belonging to no particular epoch—watch by their child's cradle. In this picture Rembrandt, until then a modest painter of small subjects, attempted for the first time to master the difficulties of a large canvas. In the Hague painting of "Simeon in the Temple," a glimpse is afforded of a wide and lofty cathedral. Those who will may read in this spaciousness a suggestion of bold aspirations, for in the portrait of himself at the Hague, too, dating from the same period, Rembrandt gazes resolutely into distance. His father's house, his native town of Leyden present too cramped a field for his labours. The world, the wide world—even great Amsterdam itself—is now to become the scene of his activities.



St. Petersburg, Hermitage

JOSEPH ACCUSED BY POTIPHAR'S WIFE

PORTRAIT COMMISSIONS AT AMSTERDAM

LET us consider the character of the commissions that awaited a painter in that city. At an epoch when art is controlled by the middle classes the portrait always plays an especially important part. The first service demanded of Art by the wealthy citizen turned Maecenas is that she should immortalise himself and his belongings. An absolutely enormous number of portraits therefore were painted in Holland during the seventeenth century. Instead of the blue-blooded aristocrats whose lineaments are familiar to us on the canvases of Flemish artists, the Dutch portrait-painters exercised their skill upon the features of an endless array of rich merchants, professors and pastors, counsellors and orators.

Instead of the aristocratic women of the world who sat to Vandyke, they painted notable housewives, stern of countenance and with muscular hands inured to the broom and the rolling-pin. Instead

of the liveried lackeys who figure in Flemish portraits holding their mistresses' trains, the Dutch painters portrayed sturdy serving-men and maids, squarely planted at their employers' side, holding small children by the hand. Instead of palace terraces with their columns and hangings, we have glimpses of citizens' parlours among whose functions the necessity for display had no place, and which testify solely to the sense of order possessed by their inhabitants.

Next in order to these multitudinous family pictures come the portrait groups of the various corporations. In lands whose social system was based on the aristocratic principle, as a rule, only persons connected by ties of blood were painted in groups; but in Holland membership of the same association furnished a sufficient pretext for this intimacy. For instance, there were the volunteer corps, each of which held its periodical banquets and annual prize-shooting. At these functions the members wore uniform, and it afforded them keen delight to pose for their portraits in this uniform. Again, there were the trade guilds. Each of these had its guildhall, and it is to these guildhalls that the picture galleries are indebted for those frequently recurring portrait groups in which the governors

or syndics of the guild are represented in solemn session, going through accounts or checking goods.

In addition to these there were benevolent institutions, almshouses and hospitals of every description. Even the ladies and gentlemen who formed the administrative committees of these institutions had their portraits painted in groups, in the act of distributing money or considering petitions. Finally, Amsterdam possessed a medical faculty. Its surgical and anatomical lectures were attended not only by students but by lay visitors, and the latter paid homage to the professors by presenting to the "Theatrum anatomicum" portrait groups representing their favourite lecturers demonstrating in the midst of their assistants. Painters like Dirk Jacobs, Cornelis Teunissen, Cornelis van Ketel, Werner van Valckert, Elias Pickenoy, Aert Pietersen and Thomas de Keyser had discovered the demand for such works, and the prospect of a like activity lay before Rembrandt when he removed in 1631, at the age of twenty-five, from Leyden to Amsterdam.

He had at first every intention of treating the world as he found it. Goethe in his "Affinities" wrote finely of the functions of the portrait-painter; "One is never entirely satisfied with the

portraits of persons one knows. For this reason I have always pitied portrait-painters. People are so rarely asked for the impossible, and that is precisely what is demanded of these artists. They are expected to take into account in their picture the relation of every other individual— whether of inclination or antipathy—to its subject ; they have to embody in their creation, not merely their own conception of a fellow man, but that of every one else. I do not wonder that such artists gradually become callous, indifferent, and self-opinionated."

In Holland, besides the question of likeness, which in itself may well disgust an artist with portrait-painting, there was another consideration. It is well known that the reason the painters of the nineteenth century so long avoided coming into contact with real life was that they considered modern attire both inartistic and ugly. "What person laying claim to artistic culture is not convinced," said the aesthetic writers of the period, "that the dress of the day is devoid of taste, hideous, and fit only for monkeys ? Is it possible by any means to reconcile style with crinolines, dress-coats and similar extravagances ?" The lot of the Dutch painters of the seventeenth century was in no respect more enviable. They could have

derived but little satisfaction from the task of rendering the tall, stiff felt hats of the gentlemen, or the rigid ruffs and starched caps of the ladies with that photographic fidelity to nature which their public demanded.

Nevertheless, Rembrandt attacked this prosaic task with unparalleled self-denial. Portrait after portrait left his easel. He was in process of becoming one of the most popular portrait-painters of Amsterdam, in so material a fashion—quite in the style of a de Keyser—did he purvey the exact articles his customers required. Only in trifles did he occasionally permit himself a deviation from the customary pattern, by introducing into his works, where practicable, a certain definite "idea." Thus in a portrait now at Cassel he painted the *Writing-master Coppenol* in the act of mending a pen, and looking up for an instant in meditation. In the London painting of the *Shipbuilder and his Wife*, he not only executed the double portrait of a married couple, but he has seized the exact moment that the old man, sitting at work in his study, turns suddenly round as his wife enters the room with a letter in her hand.

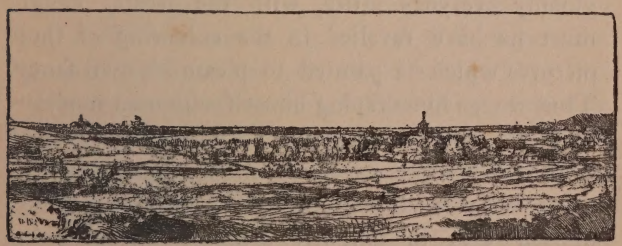
In a similar manner, in the *Anatomy Lesson* he composed a genuine group out of a loose conjunc-

tion of single portraits. This work bears the same relation, if such a comparison be permissible, to the older works of Aert Pietersen and Thomas de Keyser as the *Last Supper* of Leonardo da Vinci to that of Ghirlandajo. In Ghirlandajo's picture thirteen men are seated at table, each preoccupied with himself, his thoughts, and his meal. Leonardo introduced into the subject unity of action, by adopting the saying of Christ, "One of you shall betray Me," as its keynote, and depicting the effect produced upon the disciples by this saying. Rembrandt discovered an equally appropriate, yet hitherto unpainted *motif*—that of concentrated attention. A group, in the eyes of earlier painters, consisted simply of a number of figures, one and all individually gazing straight at the spectator or the artist. In Rembrandt's picture the assistants follow the professor's demonstration with rapt attention. Some rise from their seats and lean forward in order to see more clearly. And thus was evolved, naturally and without the least constraint, the possibility of a compact scheme of composition such as the Italians of Leonardo's time loved. That is to say: earlier portrait groups, composed of seated figures of approximately the same height, resolve themselves into a series of vertical compartments.

The Hague, Royal Gallery

THE ANATOMY LESSON

In Rembrandt's picture the corpse which forms the subject of Dr. Tulp's demonstration is as it were the base of a pyramid, whose apex is formed by the head of the assistant standing behind the rest. But the compact composition of the figures is combined with an equally compact composition of the light. The colouring of the living portraits harmonises with the pale flesh-tints of the brightly lighted corpse. Taking into account the considerations which governed Rembrandt at the time, it is hardly necessary to insist that this artistic effect was attained without the slightest sacrifice of literal truth. One cannot help feeling that these heads, even the pair represented in profile, must have met with the entire approval of the originals, as far as the likeness was concerned.



STORM AND STRESS

HE still continued to utilise his own features as the subject of his experiments in purely artistic problems. In the portraits he etched of himself during his Leyden days his investigations had been purely physiognomical. He had studied the manner in which certain emotions modify the lines of the face, by observing their effect upon his own countenance. The series of self-portraits executed at Amsterdam begins with studies in colour. The more he was compelled by the nature of his commissions to paint gloomy everyday attire, with the greater delight must he have revelled in the colouring of those pictures which he painted to please his own fancy. Thus we see him draping himself—his own model—in the most varied fashion. He throws a cloak of deep red about his shoulders, and sets upon his head a cap with waving plumes. Or else he portrays himself clad in knightly armour and gleaming helmet. He loves, too, to display chains of gold,

glittering knives, and sparkling ear-rings, in order that he may study the play of light upon metal.

At the same period he was painting a young woman in equally bright and gorgeous array. Saskia van Uylenborgh makes her initial appearance in his life-work. The acquaintance opened through a commission. The art-dealer Hendrik van Uylenborgh had bespoken from Rembrandt the portrait of his cousin, a rich orphan belonging to a patrician family of Friesland. This is the picture in the Jacquemart collection in Paris, representing Saskia as a Dutch girl of the year 1630. But in succeeding works gay fancy costumes have taken the place of the Dutch fashions of the day, precisely as in Rembrandt's portraits of himself. The dainty head is decked in a broad hat of true Rembrandt type, with a waving ostrich plume. Her shoulders are bare. Pearls gleam in her ears, about her neck, and in her hair. Or she carries an armful of flowers. Her form is swathed in a robe of glistening silk. The artist must experience Art, before he can create it. The more beauty, the more joyous colour there is in life, the greater the amount of material it furnishes to Art. This is the explanation of the festivals of costume celebrated in the days of Hans Makart, and likewise of the portraits which Rembrandt painted

of himself and Saskia. These are artists' visions, hymns to beauty and to colour, dreamed and sung in a land where no other prospect but that of a sadly prosaic world presented itself to the artist's eye.

Love came to Rembrandt and Saskia, but the latter's guardian refused his consent to the match. It would be a *mésalliance* for the youthful daughter of a patrician family to marry a man who, although confessedly a great artist, was all the same a miller's son. How did Rembrandt, in a picture now at Berlin, come to tell the tale of Samson desiring access to his wife, and confronted by a barred door? When we gaze upon that old man calling down to him the words "I have given her to another," and upon Samson himself clenching his fist in fury, do not our thoughts involuntarily turn to the painter himself? Was it merely a coincidence that he should be painting at that very time the *Rape of Proserpine*, with himself, the plebeian, in the character of ruler of the nether world, carrying off his dainty princess? The Dresden picture, too, in which Samson propounds riddles to the Philistines, reads like an occasional poem in honour of his own marriage. It was painted in 1634, the year in which the wedding at last was celebrated, and again he figures as Samson, exciting by his grim jests

alarm rather than merriment in the breasts of his wife's respectable relations.

And in those days Rembrandt was indeed a Samson. Like the hero of Israel, he was in the mood to shatter the temple of philistinism. Imagine the position of an artist dwelling in the midst of a world of coldly calculating men of business! What a charm would he not experience in playing the Bohemian for their benefit, in demonstrating to that world, as a challenge to all its ideals, that the possession of wealth is only to be valued as an instrument of æsthetic culture! It was at this period that Rembrandt began to collect. He bought up at the antiquaries' shops everything that pleased his eye in the way of ancient and artistic ornaments, costly stuffs, old furniture and weapons. He arrayed Saskia with a splendour worthy of a princess of Titian's day, so that her relations murmured at his squandering his wife's fortune. In a picture now in London we are shown the young woman in her boudoir. She is seated before a mirror, and is trying the effect of an ear-ring, while Rembrandt is about to hand her a necklace. In a celebrated picture at Dresden the couple are seen at their luxurious breakfast. Attired as a young noble, his sword by his side and a plumed cap upon his head,

he dandles his youthful wife upon his knee, and raises his glass with a defiant smile, as though challenging the whole world of philistinism.

In the years immediately following his marriage Rembrandt would seem to have been an unruly blusterer, a harebrained fire-eater, ready to do battle with all and sundry. After pandering so long, for sordid considerations of gain, to all the whims with which his sitters can harass an artist, it now afforded him keen entertainment to retaliate upon such people. That is to say, he would doubtless scoff at idealism and beauty, at improving on Nature, and all the other superior qualities which the conventional regard as the distinguishing marks of a genuine work of art. *The Rape of Ganymede* is the title of a picture now at Dresden, and Rembrandt treats his subject not only with a realism similar to that which distinguishes Ribera from Correggio, but even in a spirit of burlesque which must have created as great a sensation among that portion of the Dutch public which boasted of a classical education as did Böcklin's *Susannah at the Bath* in our own day among those who so strongly disapproved of that picture.

It cannot be denied that during those years Rembrandt showed himself devoid of taste. Even

Paris, Louvre

THE DISCIPLES AT EMMAUS

where the desire to "embêter le bourgeois" does not obtrude itself, his works are pervaded by a blustering exuberance of power which excites a distaste in the beholder exactly proportionate to the reverence he feels for the calm, sober Rembrandt of later years. It is true that Rembrandt was a child of the *barocco* period. Yet the *barocco* element that pervades his early works is ever harsh and inappropriate in its effect, for the reason that it has been so entirely eliminated from his later pictures, which are the mirror of the real Rembrandt. Remembering, for instance, the Louvre pictures of the *Good Samaritan* and the *Disciples at Emmaus*, it is difficult to realise that, twenty years earlier, their creator painted for the Stadtholder Frederick Henry that cycle of the Passion now at Munich, which in point of exaggerated emotion, theatrical posturing, and inflated draperies, is among the most characteristic productions of the *barocco* period.

THE GLAMOUR OF THE EAST

AND how did it come about that Rembrandt eventually found his true self? Which were the stages by which he emerged from the swagger and bluster of his early years a grave and serious artist? Now—quite apart from the fact that the period of wild oats does not last for ever, that every period of evolution is followed by a high level of attainment—Rembrandt discovered about the year 1635 a world which afforded him the artistic opportunities that he had sought in vain in Dutch bourgeois society, a world which he had hitherto passed carelessly by, that of Judaism. In the North, indeed, Amsterdam was the Jewish stronghold. When the great persecutions of the Jews took place in Spain, in the sixteenth century, Holland chanced to be at war with Spain. Impelled by hatred of the Spaniard she hospitably threw open her gates to those whom the enemy was expelling from his own country.

Rembrandt associated much with Jews. He was

a close friend both of the Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel and the physician Ephraim Bonus. He was so intimately acquainted with all the customary ritual of the Jewish religion, as may be seen, for instance, in his *Sacrifice of Abraham*, that the opinion has even been expressed that he was himself a Jew. That he certainly was not. There are too many traits in his character—among others his Germanic fondness for the wine-cup—which contradict this theory. Yet it is easy to understand the attractions of the Jews for the painter. To begin with, he saw in them the children of the Ancient Race. As a citizen of a country that had only recently for the first time taken its place in history, whose entire social system was still incomplete, still in the making, it was inevitable that he should feel drawn towards this people, behind whom lay a self-contained civilisation with a past extending over many thousands of years.

And the interest thus excited was not merely of a human, but also of an artistic character. After all, he had only painted the numerous studies of himself in fancy costume, and all those portraits of his Saskia, for the sake of the opportunity they afforded him of mingling his colours with a voluptuous and sensuous hand, and of escaping for a

while from the sombre hues of workaday attire. And it really existed, this fair world of his dreams, so bright with colour, which he had artificially and laboriously created for himself in those portraits! French painters of the Romantic school—Delacroix and Decamps, Fromentin and Guillaumet—travelled to Algiers, Tunis, and Cairo, in order that they might refresh their artistic sense by plunging into an orgy of bright, exotic colour. Rembrandt was able to satisfy this need in Amsterdam itself. While he surveyed all those Jews, pacing along with the dignity of patriarchs in their gaily coloured caftans and high turbans, and all those Jewesses shrouded in fabrics gleaming with gold and decked with marvellous specimens of the Arab jeweller's art, a bright patch of Oriental colour beneath the grey of Northern skies, he must have felt as though he had stepped into a tale out of the "Arabian Nights."

It was at this time that he bought a house in the Breestraat, in the very midst of the Jewish quarter. The effect upon those entering this house must have been as extraordinary as that produced in our own day by the Pompeian dwelling which Alma Tadema built for himself in the midst of modern London. For the atmosphere which the visitor

St. Petersburg, Hermitage

RECONCILIATION OF DAVID AND ABSALOM

breathed here was not that of the ordinary Dutch burgher interior ; he found instead the home of an artist, who had created in the grey North an exotic shrine for his visions of beauty. And if a common title were sought for the numerous pictures dating from this period, they could only be classed as Oriental romance cultivated in the artist's own home. Whether he depicts the reconciliation of David and Absalom, or the Angel foretelling the birth of Samson to Manoah and his wife, it is the glowing Oriental colouring of the Amsterdam Jews and Jewesses that he paints, in a setting of Oriental scenery which he imagined for himself in his own studio. Stories from the Old Testament are made to form the substratum of symphonies in colour.

In his conception of colour Rembrandt had hitherto remained a pupil of Caravaggio. Like the latter, he painted the contrasts between direct lighting and opaque shadow. But he now became conscious that, however logically this conception of colour might have arisen out of the lighting conditions of the *barocco* churches, where bright beams of light fell from lofty coloured windows athwart the obscurity of gloomy chapels, it could not be applied without modification to conditions of lighting that

were totally different. For in his studio he observed none of these contrasts between brightly illuminated objects and recesses plunged in profound obscurity. This apartment was pervaded by a uniform and subdued light, filtered through thin curtains, unsubstantial and yet ubiquitous, playing mysteriously upon the entire surface of the various objects it contained, now tenderly subduing and now heightening a colour. So Rembrandt cast off for ever the yoke of Caravaggio, and henceforth stands out an original and independent luminist. In the place of contrast harmony now reigns; in the place of oiliness we have atmosphere; instead of the dramatic struggle between light and darkness we have a discreet luministic lyric.

We may follow this conversion in those pictures in which he depicts the figure of his wife, kissed and caressed by soft light. Certainly the dainty little woman whom a St. Petersburg picture shows to us stretched upon the nuptial couch in the character of Danae, possesses nothing of the rhythm of form to which we have become accustomed in the heroic female figures of the masters of the Italian Renaissance. Yet, not excepting even Titian, we cannot help thinking that the warm breath of life, the sensuous charm of flesh was never

Paris, Louvre

WOMAN BATHING

before so exquisitely rendered. For the nude figures of Correggio and Titian, however bathed in light, always retain somewhat of the plastic qualities of marble. The suggestion is rather that of beautiful statues than of vibrating life. The dainty figure of Saskia awakes beneath the caress of light. A conception of the nude based on colouring alone has obliterated the last traces of plastic severity of form. Or consider the picture in the Hague Museum, in which Saskia, in the character of Susannah, is entering the bath. Compared with this marvellously painted figure, which the animating power of light has endowed with blood, with pulse, with the breath of life itself, the nudes of the contemporary Italians, Guercino and Dolci, might be modelled in coloured clay.

CHIAROSCURO

WAS Rembrandt capable, after he had discovered that new world of marvels where light reigned supreme, of retaining either the will or the power to concern himself with portrait commissions? A similar situation has arisen in our own time. When Impressionism presented the study of light in the guise of a fresh problem, this problem interested painters to such an extent that they utilised even portraiture as a subject of their luministic experiments. Some of them studied the effect of sunlight on the human features; others the yet more complicated effects produced by electric light or lamps covered with coloured shades. The public for its own part held the view that the merit of a portrait lay not in such artistic trifling but in the likeness alone. Rembrandt had entered upon a path which not only led to a similar artistic plane, but brought him face to face with the same perils.

In a self-portrait at Dresden he has depicted him-

self holding in front of him with outstretched arm, a guinea-fowl. The light plays on its plumage in blue-greenish and orange tones, and bathes his countenance in blue-greenish and orange reflections. In another portrait, in the possession of Baron Rothschild in Paris, he appears as a standard-bearer. A brilliant banner of flaming red, which he holds within his arm, serves to throw up into relief the features, which glow in the deep shadow with the ruddy reflection of the silk. In yet another picture in the National Gallery, the plebeian Rembrandt, the man with the coarse broad nose, is hardly to be recognised. The artist who strove so laboriously in his early Amsterdam portraits for minute fidelity to nature has veiled this picture in a mysterious half-light, wherein not only all details of draperies but also all characteristic features are merged.

This is worthy of attention; it shows the third phase in the style of his self-portraits. In the beginning he had made his own features the subject of his studies in changing shades of expression. Next he attired himself in bright draperies, in order to investigate problems in colour. Now he is exclusively interested in light—no matter whether it merges all detail in a marvellous sea of tones, or whether it creates a piquant alternation of surfaces,

now softly lighted and now half in shadow. And the same studies in lighting characterise all the other portraits that he painted about the year 1640. They were certainly not commissions; the old gentleman with the bald head who figures in a portrait of his, now at Cassel, would else hardly have suffered Rembrandt to discharge his task in the manner he did, with his profile vanishing in shadow and his bald pate shining as brightly as though illuminated by moonlight. Or, again, the lady with the fan at Buckingham Palace. Is not this portrait, with its golden light, its deep and sonorous beauty of tone into which the likeness melts away, as far removed from the conventional Dutch style of portraiture as any idealised *bella* of the Venetian School?

Or, once again, take the Berlin picture of the *Pastor Ansloo consoling a Widow*. Have the subjects of this portrait any other *raison d'être* than that of supplying interesting colour-values, with their black costumes in the midst of a finely graded harmony of grey and crimson red? One cannot help feeling that rocks were now close ahead. Creations so purely artistic in their nature were only possible so long as friends and acquaintances were willing to bow to the master's will; directly

St. Petersburg, Hermitage

ABRAHAM WITH THE THREE ANGELS

the latter encountered a sitter who expected in return for his money the literal execution of his commission, they were bound to lead to the sharpest conflicts.

Such a collision, in fact, ensued when one of the Amsterdam volunteer companies, the "Cloveniers Doele," honoured him with a commission for a large portrait group of its marksmen. At the present day, when reservists club together before their discharge in order to defray the expense of a photographic group of the whole company, the photographer's duty is so to arrange his group that each component member may appear to equal advantage; for each has paid his quota, and any gallant warrior whose features happened to be partially concealed by the shoulder of a comrade would have just cause of complaint. In Holland, painters of military groups had to reckon with a similar feeling. Since the charges were borne in equal shares by all the members of the company, the object of the painter's tactics must be to accord every individual member equal advantages in the picture. Suppose that considerations of composition might induce a certain artist to depict both the hands of one member of his group of sitters. Immediately the remaining eleven would demand

that their hands also should be included! Or he might, for the sake of variety, have painted only five of his heads full face, and represented the other seven in profile. The latter would at once conceive that the former had obtained an unfair advantage over them!

The earliest Dutch military groups, painted in the sixteenth century by artists such as Dirk Barents and Cornelis Teunissen, for this reason produce an effect that is nothing short of idiotic. A dozen men, all seen full face, stare straight at the spectator, and at the same time gesticulate with their four-and-twenty hands! And why? They have not the faintest idea, except that those hands should come into the picture. At a later period full-length figures replaced the half-length portraits of which these groups had hitherto been composed. Parade formation was selected as the most suitable grouping for this purpose. This enabled captain, lieutenant, standard-bearer and the rest of the gallant company to display themselves, each to the greatest advantage, in the full splendour of their militia uniforms. The picture of Werner van Valckert in the Rijks Museum furnishes an example of this style.

But dating from the commencement of the seven-

teenth century a little more life began to be infused into this barren scheme of composition. The great Franz Hals extorted from the Haarlem marksmen permission to depict them engaged in various forms of action, instead of standing motionless at attention. In one portrait group they are seated at their cups round a table. In another they are trooping into the courtyard of their drill-hall to engage in prize-shooting. Sitting and standing figures alternate, some in profile, some full face. Where the company has assembled on parade, it falls into easy and unconstrained groups. But even Franz Hals did not venture to take further liberties solely in the interests of Art. Even he accepted the fact that such pictures should be nothing more than a register of the members of a volunteer company done in paint. He too accommodated himself to the prosaic condition that every gentleman figuring in the group should be ticketed with a number corresponding to a similar number on a placard affixed to the frame, upon which the name and rank of each of its members were duly set forth. Against the most essential condition of all, a faithful likeness, he never rebelled, any more than he did against the fundamental principle of "equal rights for all." And by avoiding depth and spaciousness in these

compositions, and arranging his figures after the manner of a frieze, by never striving after interesting effects of lighting, but flooding the entire composition with uniform, bright daylight, he attained a result which was ever denied to Rembrandt; namely, that none of his sitters could complain of being arbitrarily thrust into the background, or undeservedly relegated to a dark corner.

Rembrandt's picture is celebrated under the name of the *Night Watch*. Even this designation is sufficient to prove how unheard-of was its conception. Standing before the picture the spectator is at first inclined to believe that he is indeed gazing into the darkness of night. In his capacity of luminist, Rembrandt has caught very finely the spirit of this darkness, which is not that of night. The fundamental idea is that the company is in the act of issuing forth from a dark covered courtyard into a blaze of sunlight. The two leading figures, the Captain and the Ensign, have already emerged from the darkness. Arrayed in bright red and pale yellow respectively, they shine and sparkle in as mysterious a fashion as the messengers of heaven who appear among men in the pictures of the primitive masters. At a little distance behind them a firefly, a tiny glow-worm, attracts the attention.

It is a girl clad in white, and at her girdle hangs a cock on whose plumage the light glows, glitters, and sparkles. Rembrandt threw in, gratis, the figure of this little girl, for which no one had asked him, simply because the composition needed a fleck of light of a certain magnitude in the middle distance. Altogether he supplied considerably more than was stipulated in his contract, for he painted twenty-eight marksmen instead of seventeen in order that he might better attain the impression of a movement *en masse*, of a crowd rapidly pressing onward. Yet, on the other hand, while he gave more than the warriors could justly demand, at the same time he annoyed them in that he by no means supplied them with that which they had expected from him when they entrusted him with the commission. The sum of 1700 florins was paid for the picture. This price works out at seventeen shares of 100 florins each, and where are the portraits of the seventeen contributors? The Captain and the Ensign might well be satisfied, and the probable measure of their approval renders the annoyance of the rest all the more intelligible. For—apart from the fact that most of them are unrecognisable, since their features are eclipsed or barred by the arms of their front-rank men, by

banners and butt-ends of weapons—a man who is anxious for his own portrait and has paid as much for it as his captain, does not as a rule care to be relegated to the background and shortened by perspective to the dimensions of a dwarf; especially if it be as dark there as the proverbial wolf's den or a railway tunnel.

In short, under the spell of the luministic ideas which at that time preoccupied him, Rembrandt had attempted to exercise the functions of a poet of light, even in a case in which the most prosaic possible treatment would have been also the most judicious and appropriate. In this manner did the *Night Watch* become as a work of art one of the greatest that our earth contains, but as a badly executed commission a great fiasco for Rembrandt. Instead of being hung on the principal wall in the hall of the company's headquarters, for which it had been intended, it was banished, after being barbarously cut down in size, to a side-wall, where it was less obtrusive. The worthy marksmen had done with Rembrandt. There were Bol, Flinck, van der Helst, and many more who could be relied upon for the faithful discharge of similar commissions. And nothing was farther from Rembrandt's thoughts than concern at his ill-success. An etching

of his, executed at about the same time, with a fallen man in the foreground and a phœnix above him rising jubilantly into the air, might well inspire the idea that this allegory was capable of a personal application—that the popular painter was no more, but that the artist Rembrandt was now freed from the last bond which fettered the flight of his genius.

LANDSCAPE ARTIST AND PAINTER OF THE SPIRITUAL EMOTIONS

IN other respects, too, the year 1642 was indeed a fateful one for Rembrandt. The extent of his indifference to the loss of popular favour was only equalled by the depth of his sorrow for the loss of his wife. Saskia, who had been for several years in delicate health, died in childbed, after presenting him with a son—little Titus. Rembrandt was alone. A solitary in the midst of bourgeois society, he had gradually withdrawn more and more to the refuge of his own home, and now he was alone in it. This explains the fact that his etchings of landscapes commence from this period.

He had ere this already taken an occasional interest in landscape, and in his work in this branch of his art we remark the same evolution in style through which he passed as a figure-painter. His early landscapes are quite *barocco*. The dramatic war of the elements in a setting of heroic scenery

THE THREE TREES

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attracted him. At Cracow and Boston, in Oldenburg and Brunswick there are pictures of his which recall at the first glance the works of Salvator Rosa, with their weatherbeaten castles perched upon craggy heights, their decaying bridges spanning abysses, and their glaring light breaking through clouds of a deep brown. Then, during the period that he was painting scenes from Old Testament history, he continued in masterly fashion to furnish appropriate backgrounds to the figures he portrayed in the garb of the East. Although he never left Amsterdam, he was able to convey in a marvellous manner in such pictures as the *Susannah* of the Hague or the *Noli Me Tangere* in Buckingham Palace the impression of a sultry, sensuous, Oriental atmosphere.

With the advent of his fortieth year, however, these fancy landscapes begin to be replaced by studies from nature. Unfettered by commissions, alone in his house, where Saskia's laughter was for ever stilled, he felt a craving to commune with Nature through the medium of long walks. The sensations experienced by the boy at Leyden, when he gazed down from the hill where stood his father's windmill upon the wide plain below, were never anything more than an undefined and hazy

sentiment; the man possessed the power of giving form to that sentiment.

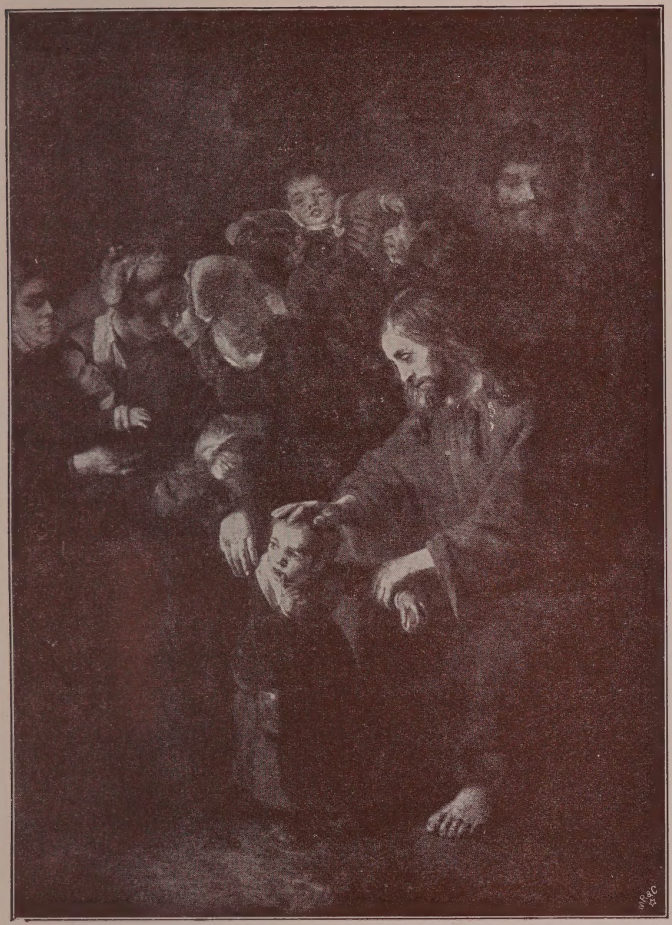
Holland is an apparently monotonous country, devoid of charm. She boasts neither imposing mountain scenery, nor glow of colour, nor striking effects of light. Wherever the eye turns, it gazes into a void. A church tower, a clump of trees, a windmill, a strawrick, or a small cottage are almost the sole objects that break the line of the horizon, which merges imperceptibly into the vast expanse of sky above it. Those in search of interesting and picturesque details can make little of that poetry of Infinity which in Holland is characteristic of the face of Nature. Hence it was that the majority of Dutch landscape-painters journeyed to Italy or Norway, countries whose scenery afforded more definite features than air, mist, and clouds. Rembrandt was the first to grasp the sublime beauty of this grandiose Nirvana. It is often by a few lines alone, heavier in the foreground and becoming gradually fainter towards the middle distance, that he attracts the eye to the depth of space beyond. And if that which conveys the maximum of expression with the minimum of effort is indeed rightly characterised as a masterpiece, then these drawings, in spite of their small

size, are among the greatest marvels known to the history of Art. Even the landscapes of the refined Philip Konink seem cramped and flat by the side of Rembrandt's etchings. It is only certain Japanese woodcuts and some of the pastels of Max Liebermann that have suceeded in conveying the suggestion of the Infinite with so much power.

The memory of Saskia faded but slowly out of his pictures. Evidence of this may be sought not only in those portraits which he devoted to her after her death—that in Berlin, for instance, from which she gazes so placidly, with such subdued and tender radiance, straight at the spectator—but in other of his works we may well fancy that the thought of Saskia had something to do with his choice of a subject. He was so lonely, so entirely without family ties, in spite of the little motherless Titus. Hence, doubtless, it was that at that period he repeatedly painted the Holy Family—visions of cosy rooms in which Mary and Joseph sit, man and wife beside the cradle of their child. The mystery of death, too—marvellous resurrections and mystic apparitions—occupied his attention. He drew Christ summoning Lazarus from the tomb, and painted him sojourning in spirit form with the disciples at Emmaus. In his fortunate years the

Oriental legendary tone of the Old Testament had captivated him. He painted the brightly coloured Moorish draperies of the Amsterdam Jews in a setting of brightly coloured exotic scenery which he created for himself in his own studio. All this glowing colour, all this sparkling light now appeared to him lifeless and inanimate. He sought inspiration from the Bible, spiritual inspiration, and the path upon which he now entered led him at last to the New Testament, so rich in tender spiritual lyrics. And the works thus inspired are at the same time the mirror of the finished artist, the real Rembrandt.

The pictures of the Italian artists were church pictures. Enshrined above chapel altars they ministered to the aims of a religion which valued Art as the handmaiden of Faith. The puritanical Calvinism of the Dutch forbade all ecclesiastical decorations of that nature. Therefore if Rembrandt, in spite of this feeling, proceeded to treat the customary subjects from the Gospel, he did so out of pure pleasure in the poetic aspect of those ancient legends on which during so many centuries the greatest artists have essayed their creative powers. And since the traditional forms under which these subjects were represented had been stamped upon



London, National Gallery

CHRIST BLESSING THE CHILDREN

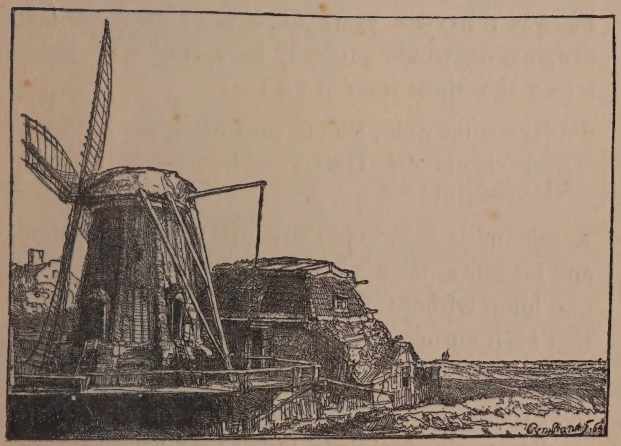
them mostly by Italians, it was natural that Rembrandt too should follow in his early works the Italian tradition. Now, since the Italian pictures were designed for devotional purposes, there is in them a certain solemnly didactic element. The characters they represent are not engaged in action among themselves, but address themselves to the communion of the faithful. The manner in which they convey their message to the latter accords at the same time with the liveliness of the Southern temperament. They emphasise the import of their words by impressive and forcible gestures. As his etching of the *Raising of Lazarus* proves, Rembrandt, both in his treatment of light and also in the language of gesture, was long a pupil of the Italian masters. Caravaggio himself might have painted the heroic pose of that gigantic Christ with uplifted arm.

Yet the conviction must have come to him at last that such language of gesture was just as locally bound up with the popular temperament of the South as Caravaggio's conception of colour was the product of local conditions arising from the contrasts of light and shade to be found in the Italian churches of the *barocco* period. For the man of the North knows nothing of that forcible mimicry, of

those motions of the hands with which the Latin races know so well how to underline the expression of their spiritual emotions. However excited he may be, it is but seldom that his excitement betrays itself in physical action.

In this connection it is instructive to observe various drawings in which Rembrandt expresses the difference between his and Leonardo's conception of the Last Supper. In these we may follow the very process by which he altered and remodelled those Italian Apostles into unemotional Northerners, in whom the spiritual drama that is harrowing their souls pursues its course without the slightest physical movement of a dramatic character. And all the subsequent works of the Master possess the same characteristics of quiet restraint and mild discretion. Whether he is painting the Adoration of the Magi or the Good Samaritan, Christ with the Disciples at Emmaus or bidding little children to come to Him, whether he is etching the Sermon on the Mount or the "weary and heavy-laden" pressing around the Saviour—those Bible themes whereon, in earlier days when he was painting from the Old Testament, he had delighted to build up symphonies in light now serve instead as a vehicle for the expression of tender and spiritual emotion.

And he was able to convey all these delicate shades of feeling—devout resignation and blind confidence, fright, astonishment, and misery in search of consolation—in their purest, most spiritualised form, free from all trace of studio-work on the living model, and also from any foreign dialect of the language of expression and gesture. The subdued and melancholy colouring is in strict harmony with the tranquil melancholy subjects—a greenish-bluish light, which pulses in faint vibrations through mysterious shadow.



HENDRICKJE

AT the same time, it must not be conceived that Rembrandt remained permanently steeped in melancholy. His was a problematical nature; much too complex to be fitted to the Procrustean bed of any single characteristic. Consider the circumstances. When Saskia died, he was thirty-six years of age. Had he known Goethe, he would probably have read with much satisfaction those lines of his:

"Alles was ihr wollt, ich bin euch wie inmer gewärtig,
Aber einsam des Nachts schlafen — oh Freunde verzeiht!" *

Rembrandt's health and strength were unimpaired, and his senses far too active to permit of his remaining long without female society. It is recorded that even during Saskia's illness he had established regular relations with Geertje, little Titus's nurse.

* "All that ye will, my service as ever attends you,
But to slumber alone through the nights—oh, ask me not that!"

Berlin, the Grote Press

HENDRICKJE STOFFELS

(After the Etching by Peter Halm)

And after the death of his wife, concurrently with those works that speak of the widower's loneliness he was producing others which are eloquent of the passions, the cravings of the flesh. Note the volcanic sensuousness which characterises the *Susannah and the Elders* of the Berlin Museum—that picture with its two voluptuaries, of whom one, sleek and over-fed, savours the spectacle of the nude flesh as though gazing on a juicy roast ; while the other, pale and trembling with concupiscence, is about to pounce like a vulture on his prey. Or the many etchings which owe their origin to the same period. Degas is recalled to our recollection, no less than Rops, by the contemplation of these drawings, wherein Rembrandt delineated the nude female figure with a realism so thorough and so scrupulously minute, and often at the same time with such repellent fidelity to nature, that he would seem to have desired to emancipate himself altogether from the spell of passion, by compelling his attention to dwell only on what was repulsive and disgusting.

A single figure among these female models arrests our attention by the piquant charm of its youthful strength, the bloom of its rustic health. The idea suggests itself that the forty-year-old Rembrandt had drawn a lot in its way very similar to that

which fell to the fifty-three-year-old Rubens when, after the death of Isabella Brandt, he led the young and voluptuous Helen Fourment to the altar. A picture of Rembrandt's in the National Gallery shows a woman in the act of bathing. She is holding up her garment, and the water reaches to her knees. Zorn has painted similar bathing scenes in our own day, but not with such astounding power. A picture in the Louvre depicts the same young woman in the character of Bathsheba. Words are powerless to describe the radiant beauty with which the wonderfully modelled figure of this brunette stands out from the obscurity of the background and the white of her garment. There are numerous other portraits of the same young woman. One of these, in the Morrison collection, shows her in a white dress which affords a piquant contrast to her brown complexion. In another, at Berlin, she stands at a window, arrayed in just such showy Oriental stuffs as Saskia used to wear, and gazes at us with her large black eyes.

He had found that which he needed. Hendrickje Stoffels, a peasant girl from Waterland, was twenty-three years of age when she entered Rembrandt's service as housekeeper, and she remained, until her death, faithfully at his side. Although he never

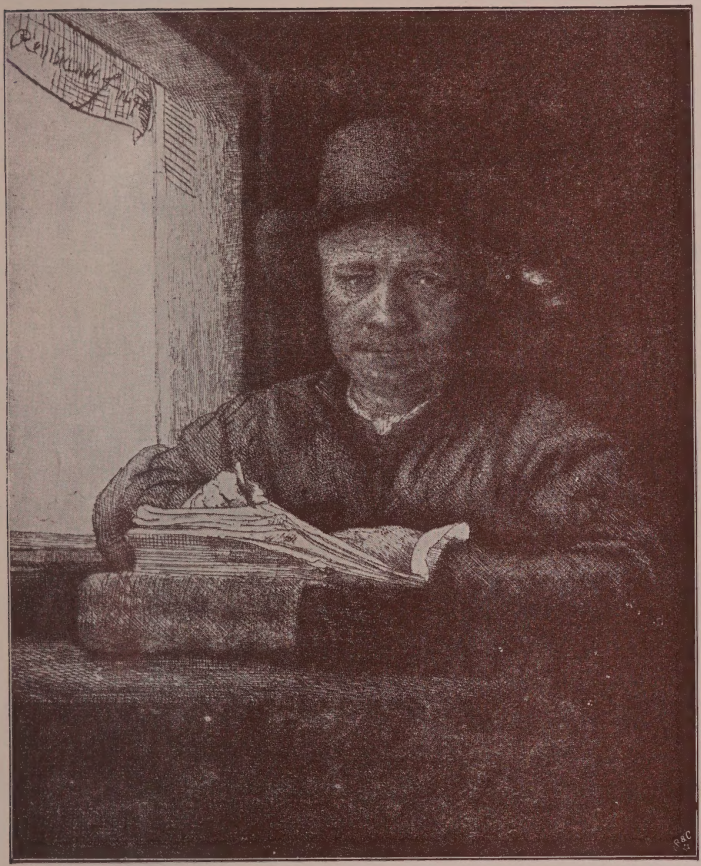
London, National Gallery

WOMAN BATHING

made her his wife (probably for the prosaic reason that Saskia's will conferred upon him the entire control of Titus's fortune only so long as he remained unmarried) she clave to him with heroic constancy, even when evil days began to follow hard upon the good. Titus, Saskia's son, grew up beneath her fostering care a comely youth—that pale refined boy whom we know from the portrait of the Kann collection in Paris. Other figures, too, which put in occasional appearances in Rembrandt's pictures are those of persons belonging to his household. The old woman who is drying the foot of the bathing Bathsheba in the Louvre picture is Hendrickje's mother, whom she took with her into Rembrandt's house. The little peasant girl whom he painted in a picture at St. Petersburg with a broom in her hand is a cousin of Hendrickje's, who also took part in the domestic duties. A little daughter, Cornelia, presented to him by Hendrickje, was, as it were, the promise of a new Spring.

During those years Rembrandt experienced something like a rejuvenescence of his whole art. His home, which had lain so long in the shadow of the tomb, became once more the scene of his labour and of his happiness. We need only take note of etchings such as that in which he sits at the window

in his ordinary working dress, his felt hat upon his head, quite absorbed in his work. Or that showing the young Jan Six leaning in the recess of a window perusing a document, while the sunlight plays so cheerfully upon the floor and furniture. Or that, again, of the art-dealer Francken sitting with such placid enjoyment among his treasures. We cannot escape the conviction that drawings characterised by so intimate a charm could only be the work of a man who was himself quite absorbed in his home, and who enjoyed the quiet charm of that home with an intensity that was almost pathetic. They possess a quality very rarely encountered in art, a quality only seen in our own day in certain works of the Danish painters; they convey to the spectator the impression, not that he is gazing upon a work of art, but that he is witnessing an actual scene replete with intimate suggestion.



SELF-PORTRAIT

THE MONUMENTAL STYLE

THE style of the work which Rembrandt produced about the year 1650 is absolutely sculptural in its effect. When he commenced painting thirty years before, he might have passed as the double of Gerard Dou—trivial, caustic, timid, and pedantically dry. But a picture such as the *Bathsheba* of the Louvre might be hung in the Sistine Chapel without suffering from its propinquity to the work of Michel Angelo. What marvels upon marvels is it not within the power of light to achieve! It is even capable of conveying sentiment, according as it diffuses over objects a cheerful glow or melancholy shadows. On the other hand it may, divesting itself of all psychical influence, simply exercise its power of creating mighty forms—that power which clothes flat surfaces with plastic roundness, bestows on linear sections the volume of a solid body, and endows that body with the impressiveness of a statue by accentuating points of importance and eliminating

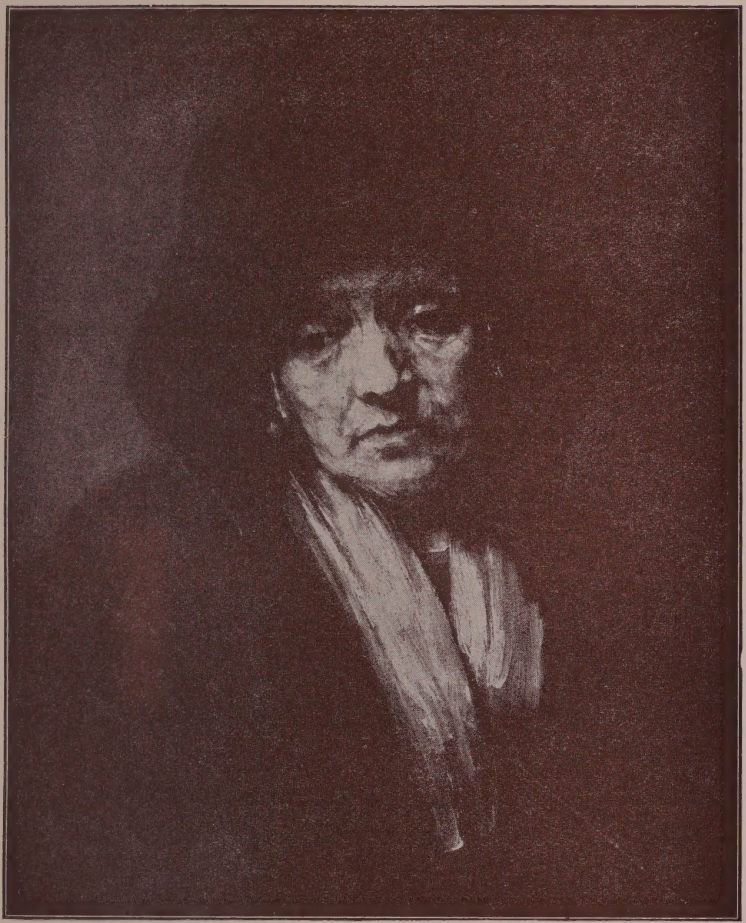
those of no account. Many of Rembrandt's pictures in this style, in which light has been employed as a factor in the modelling of forms, remind us of Rodin's sculptures ; for example, that grand monumental work in which God appears to Abraham in the form of an Angel in order to predict to him the birth of Isaac. Or again, that other and no less powerful picture which shows Jacob, blind and aged, blessing, with groping, trembling hand, his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

It is impossible, however, to discuss Rembrandt's later portraits without causing them to stand out against the background of the collective history of Art. A portrait is the product of the collaboration of two persons—the one who paints and the one who is painted. This can be clearly perceived by any one who remembers Jan van Eyck's *Man with the Carnation*, Dürer's *Holzschuher*, or Hans Holbein's *Gisze*. All these persons are on the alert. The painter has instructed them to hold their hands in this manner or in that, to gaze in this or that direction. And they act on these instructions until they are allowed a rest. Leonardo, in his portrait of *La Gioconda* was the first to attempt to obviate this stiffness. The lady was to

smile ; her eyes were not to appear as though glued to a photographer's camera. Therefore, it is related, he retained musicians and reciters to be present at the sittings and ensure that Madonna Lisa should remain in propitious mood.

The *barocco* period took a further step in advance by seizing upon the momentary emotions which flit through the human brain. Velazquez in Spain, Franz Hals in Holland, and Rembrandt himself in his earlier etchings, reproduced with vivid realism the effect wrought upon the human features by smiles, laughter, grimaces, horror, and wrath. Still, even though in such works the collaboration of the artist and model be less palpable, the relation of the sitter to the outer world remains unchanged. We can only experience mirth or anger in response to an impression conveyed from without. But now turn to Rembrandt's later pictures ! Here both expressions are entirely eliminated. The subjects of these portraits seem to be utterly unconscious of the presence of the painter ; so far as they are concerned, the entire outer world has ceased to exist. They live on, all alone with their thoughts and dreams, their hopes and cares, within the confines of their inner existence, so absorbed in themselves that they neither see nor hear aught of

what goes on around them. Observe awhile the etching of Ephraim Bonus, the physician, leaving a sick-room and pausing for a moment in meditation upon the stairs. Take note in the Dulwich Gallery of Hendrickje's little cousin dreamily gazing before her, lost to the outer world and all its impressions. In the galleries at Haigh Hall and Vienna note the portraits of Titus reading and singing; in the Pitti that of the old man whose brooding gaze is fixed on space as though his whole life were passing in review before him. And note particularly in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg the portrait of Hendrickje's mother, who seems so rapt from the material world that the spectator cannot escape the conviction that, if she were called by name, she would start up in affright, like one walking in her sleep. Works such as these proclaim a new era in the history of portraiture. The portrait, apart from some isolated examples such as Raphael's meditative *Cardinal Bibbiena*, had hitherto simply existed as the presentment of its subject in his relation to the outer world; it now becomes the analysis of his innermost soul, laid bare of all disguise in his most intimate moments.



St. Petersburg, Hermitage

THE MOTHER OF HENDRICKJE

RUIN

MEANWHILE a storm was gathering over Rembrandt's head. Immersed in his work, he had not observed that for a long time he had been arousing public resentment. A life such as he now led, in the society of a woman to whom he was united by no religious bond, outraged every fundamental principle of morality. There came a time when Hendrickje was cited before the Consistory on the charge of "living in concubinage with the painter van Rijn," and was sentenced to a severe ecclesiastical disciplinary punishment—exclusion from the Holy Communion. It is permissible to hazard the conjecture that there may be a certain connexion between that remarkable picture of 1654, in which the stern Potiphar is examining in the manner of an investigating magistrate the unfortunate Joseph, charged with incontinence, and the scene before the higher spiritual court. And this scene was the signal for all the further events which now followed.

It frequently happens that the very qualities in an artist which later ages most admire prove to be his own undoing. The finest of Rembrandt's creations, those by which the real Rembrandt is revealed to us, could never have existed if he had, as a practical man, confined his talents to the production of popular pictures. But since he painted, for the most part, not for the public but to please himself, it was inevitable that he should go to the wall. Financial disaster was approaching, hastened by those aristocratic tastes of which he never wearied. It was not only during his wedlock with Saskia that he spent enormous sums on jewellery, priceless ancient fabrics, and similar articles. Even in his later years, although his own personal needs were exceedingly small, he spent money like a Crœsus, for he became a collector. Pictures by Titian, Palma Vecchio, and Giorgione, the rarest old prints, even antiques were among the possessions of the man whom ultra-classical aesthetes stigmatised as a barbarian. It is even related—and this is typical of the man—that he would often run up the bids at auctions in order to demonstrate to his fellow countrymen how highly the art of the great masters should be prized! Owing to a financial crisis through which Holland was passing about the middle of the

'fifties, it was hopeless to expect that the collection brought together with such refined taste could be dispersed on terms favourable to the owner. So the man through whose hands hundreds of thousands had flowed like water became suddenly poor. The return of sums lent him during the time of his prosperity was demanded. A picture at Cassel, the so-called *Geometer*, shows us a man plunged in such profound reflection that he might be seeking a way of escape from a labyrinth. In like manner might Rembrandt himself have brooded over possible means of escape from his necessities.

It was in vain. In 1656 his creditors caused him to be declared bankrupt. His house and his collections were put up to public auction, and owing to the prevailing unfavourable financial conditions, the proceeds of the sale were far from sufficing even to cover Rembrandt's debts.

But the cruel blows which Fate had thus dealt him were powerless to arrest his creative work. With an equanimity intelligible only to those who themselves understand what it means to forget the world and one's own self under the hypnotic influence of work, he took his seat before a butcher's shop and painted that wonderful picture of the *Slaughtered Ox* now in the Louvre, on the

interior of which the light plays with such magical effect. Indeed, he was even capable of dedicating two fine etchings to the Haarings, father and son, the appraisers who conducted the auction. Several of his other works afford what is at the most a very indirect indication of his frame of mind. When Böcklin was meeting with failure after failure at Basle, he painted nothing but gruesome pictures such as the *Furies* and the *Ride of Death*. So Rembrandt, too, at the very time that purse-proud plebeians were "viewing" his collections set out for auction, executed his etching *Christ Shown to the People*—that picture of the brutal, foolish crowd thronging about the Sufferer, who stands patiently before the façade of an aristocratic mansion. And since Michelangelo's *Moses* arising in his wrath is popularly conceived to personify the painter himself, we may well be pardoned if the mighty *Moses* at Berlin, betrayed by his own people and dashing to pieces in grim fury the Tables of the Law, brings before our eyes in like manner the figure of Rembrandt.

Rembrandt's house passed into the possession of a well-to-do shoemaker. He himself seemed to have long since faded from the public memory. The extraordinary legend, to be found in the older

Berlin, Royal Gallery

MOSES BREAKING THE TABLES OF THE LAW

biographies of the painter, that he ended his days at Stockholm as Court painter to the King of Sweden, is attributable solely to the fact that, as far as his fellow countrymen were concerned, he had sunk into that oblivion which overtakes all those proscribed by society. At first he had found refuge in obscure hostelries, where he was quite unknown. Later on the energetic, heroic Hendrickje sought to provide fresh means of subsistence for him and his family by opening a small business as an art-dealer. Hendrickje provided for Rembrandt's maintenance, and he on his part formally contracted to indemnify her for its cost by delivering to her annually a fixed number of pictures and etchings. It is hardly necessary to specify the object of this agreement between the two, namely, that Hendrickje hoped by these means to avert a distraint, for the benefit of his creditors, upon such works as Rembrandt might yet produce.

The new dwelling in which they now established themselves lay in the Rozengracht, a narrow lane at the end of the Ghetto, where Jewish dealers in secondhand goods expose their wares for sale. Once upon a time, in the picture now at Dresden, he had depicted himself and Saskia revelling in luxurious surroundings. Now, according to contemporary

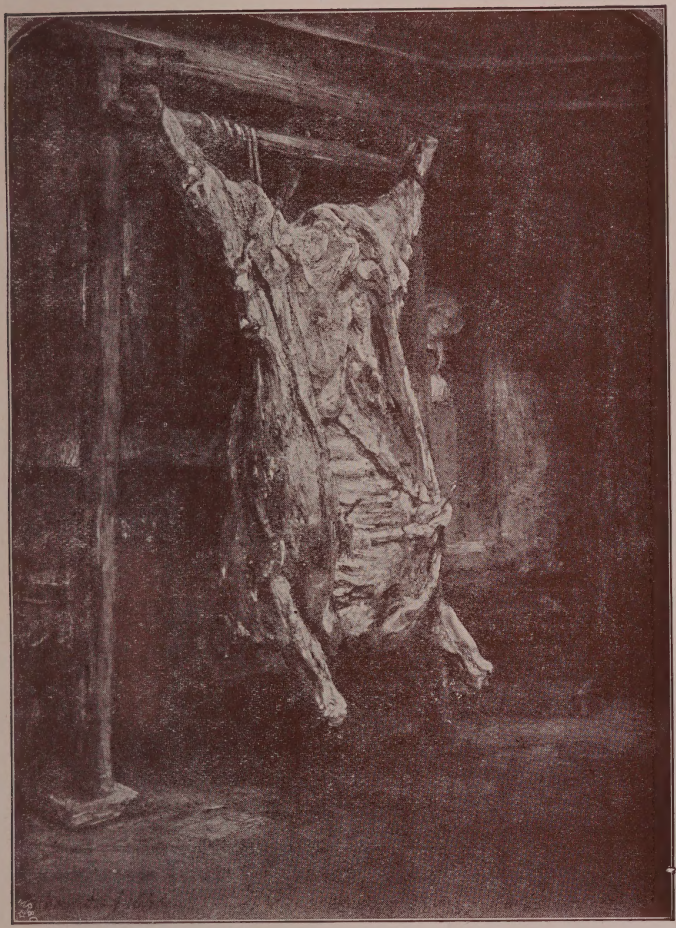
chroniclers, his daily fare consisted of bread, pickled herrings, and cheese. And yet—in spite of all! this proud, defiant, intrepid challenge echoes throughout Rembrandt's last works. We see him in the Louvre portrait of 1660 with swathed head, indeed, as though suffering from headache, and with deep furrows descending from his sunken eyes to the corners of his mouth, yet ever at his easel, palette and brush in hand, his eyes fixed on his model.

It is indeed the Art of poverty that inspires these last works of his. For instead of the rare and costly stuffs of former days, long since dispersed under the hammer of Haaring, he now paints rags. Instead of the soft rays that filtered through the curtains of his studio in the Breestraat, he now paints that cold garish light which floods the garrets of the poor. Pictures such as the praying pilgrim of the Kann collection in Paris, and that last portrait of Hendrickje's mother in the same collection, trimming her nails with a rusty pair of scissors, afford striking examples of this—the last phase. And yet, what power still animates his pictures! how astounding the greatness of his conception of form! It is hardly too much if we assign them a place but little inferior to that occupied by the greatest work

of Art that exists upon earth—that *Christ Crowned with Thorns* of the Munich Pinakothek, which Titian painted when ninety-eight years of age.

Mention of the works of Rembrandt's old age recalls more particularly the *Staalmeesters*. Jan van de Capelle, a marine painter and owner of dye-works, had contrived, in grateful recollection of a distant past in which Rembrandt had been his teacher, to induce the Syndics of the Clothmakers' Guild to come to the rescue of the unfortunate eccentric with a commission. And in this case Rembrandt can hardly be said to have disappointed the expectations of his patrons. The *Night Watch* and the *Staalmeesters*—between these two works there is a gulf fixed as wide as the world itself. When he painted the *Night Watch* he was conscious of possessing a divine control over the magic powers of light. He essayed to shed upon a picture which should have been but the collective portrait of a group of marksmen a glamour of beauty such as the world had never before beheld. He experienced then in his own person what a prosaic awakening awaits all artists who dream of the transfiguration of life through the medium of Art. On this occasion he did not relapse into the follies of youth. Abstaining from all luministic extravagances—and

even from any attempt at realising his cherished idea of establishing unity of *motif* as the fundamental basis of his composition—he discharged a prosaic commission in the prosaic spirit in which it had been entrusted to him, namely, by painting five gentlemen, duly posed for their portraits, in the most ordinary daylight. An observer without the training necessary to qualify him for distinguishing differences in quality would fail to perceive any difference between this picture and the ordinary "guild" pieces painted by third and fourth-rate artists to the entire satisfaction of their patrons. Only the cultured connoisseur, a description which could hardly apply to the Syndics of the Cloth-makers' Guild, would recognise that here again Rembrandt had achieved—one might almost say, surreptitiously—not only a "real Rembrandt," but one of the very highest rank.



Paris, Louvre

THE FLAYED OX

PARTING VISIONS

IT is a strange reflection that after the completion of the *Staalmeesters* misfortune once more overwhelmed him; as though Fate had intended to admonish him that a painter of his fibre should seek from his own inspiration alone the subjects of his compositions. Twenty-two years before, just as he had completed the *Night Watch*, Saskia died, and now he lost Hendrickje, whom Titus had already preceded to the grave. He was once more alone, sixty years of age, and robbed of the last human being who had imposed any restraint of order or control upon his undisciplined nature. So now he sought the last resort of those who yearn to forget. Alcohol brought back to him the brief illusion of that happiness which life no longer had the power to offer, and since there was but little money in his pocket, it was to alcohol in its cheapest and most condensed form, that of spirits, that he had recourse. In his last self-portraits he appears bemused. His eyes are

dull, his cheeks flabby and puffy. And yet at times the tired, faded features are as though transfigured. While he crouched in low taverns, huddled in his dirty brown cloak, with eyes apparently fixed on vacancy, dreams of loveliness—brighter than any ever created by the Fata Morgana—took shape and passed before his spiritual vision. He needed no models to aid in giving them form; he needed no costly draperies or glittering ornaments. All he needed was his brush and his colours. Verlaine, drunk with absinthe, wrote his finest poems upon the marble top of the rickety table at which he used to sit in a smoky café. In like manner Rembrandt, the beggar, the derelict, the associate of beggars, yet conjured up in his last works a world of fabulous and resplendent beauty. Their effect upon the eye is as though one gazed into a jewel-casket, or as though a mountain, bursting with pearls and diamonds, opened at the word "Sesame!"

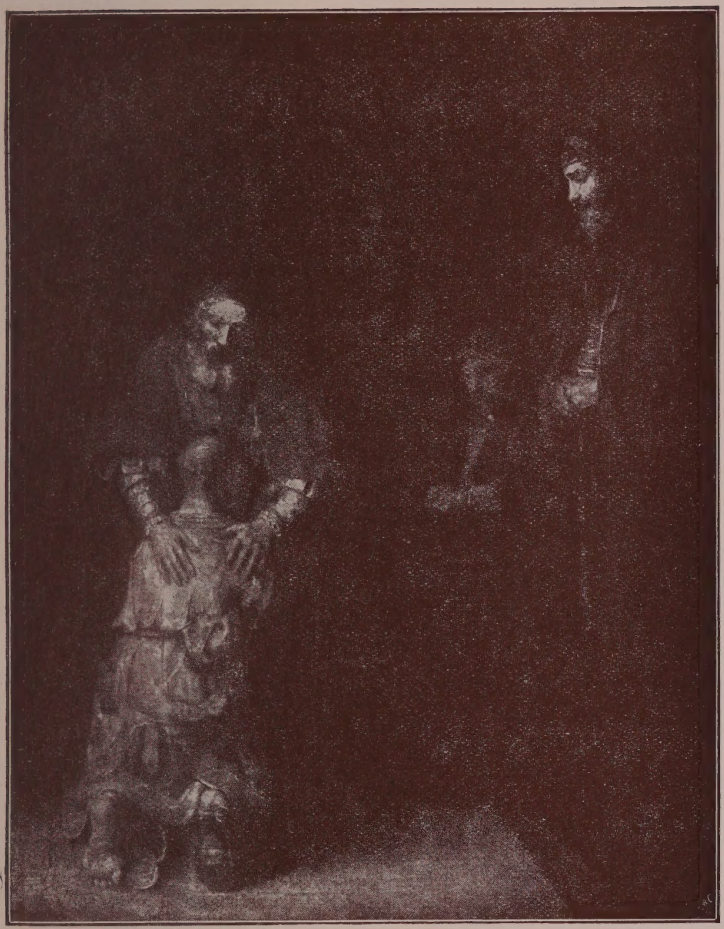
Rembrandt had passed through all the phases of luminism. He had painted light caressingly voluptuous and tremulously melancholy, the light that plays upon rich and gorgeous draperies and the light that reveals the rags and tatters of the poor. All through he had been a luminist, a painter of

light. His last works are a triumph of pure glowing colour. We are reminded on the one hand of Delacroix and Manticelli, and on the other of the mediæval mosaics and the productions of the most modern *pointillistes*. Colours of prime strength and fulness, when placed in juxtaposition in dots or patches according to optical laws, reciprocally enhance their respective values to a remarkable extent. Rembrandt in his last works had already commenced to examine this problem, since treated by Signac in his book "D'Eugène Delacroix au Neoimpressionisme." These pictures are simply modelled in paint, in the same manner that a sculptor kneads his clay. Viewed at close quarters, nothing is apparent but a chaos of mounds of paint —red and orange, blue and green; retreating to the proper distance, we see these mounds blend together into mighty plastic forms, and at the same time into colour-harmonies with the resonance of trumpet-blasts.

Examples of this later technique are afforded by that picture at the Hague in which Saul listens in deep meditation to the playing of David, that other in Paris representing Pilate, clad in a mantle which glitters with gold, washing his hands, and again a third, at Brunswick, which shows the aged and

amorous Boaz approaching Ruth. There is also a work in the St. Petersburg Hermitage which can never be forgotten by any one who has once stood before it, on account of its resonant tones of brick-red, and we would fain see in this picture, the last upon which the hand of Rembrandt rested, an epilogue to his own life. It tells the story of the Prodigal Son, who went forth into the world a youth of high degree, to return to his father's house a frowsy beggar.

Rembrandt passed away on the 8th of October, 1669, at the age of sixty-three. Except the old brown blouse which the painter wears in his latest self-portraits, a few shirts, and the tools of his craft, he left nothing behind him—unless we regard as his legacy those pictures which found no purchaser during his lifetime, and yet have sufficed to enshrine his name among those of the greatest Immortals of all the ages.



St. Petersburg, Hermitage

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON

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